



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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PREPARED REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD SPENCE **CONFERENCE REPORT ON S. 1059**

FY 00 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Wednesday, September 15, 1999

Mr. Speaker, the fiscal year 2000 defense authorization bill was reported out of the Armed Services Committee back in May on a vote of 55-1, and it passed the House in June on a vote of 365-58. The conference report before us today enjoys equally strong bipartisan support as all 36 Republican and Democrat committee conferees have signed the conference report – only the second time this has happened since 1981.

Mr. Speaker, the funding authorized in the bill is consistent with the increased spending levels set by the Congress in the budget resolution. As a result of this increased spending and a careful reprioritization of the President's budget request, we have provided the military services some of the tools necessary to better recruit and retain quality personnel, and to better train and equip them.

However, as I indicated on the House floor back in June, there are three broad Post Cold War trends that ought to concern all Americans.

First, the level of resources that the U.S. devotes to national defense remains at a historical low. Second, our military forces are being tasked at a record pace with an ever-expanding list of peacekeeping, peace-making and other contingency missions. And third, the world is an increasingly dangerous place.

The Congress has repeatedly expressed concerns about growing threats, declining defense budgets and increasing missions. Over the past year, the nation's military leaders have begun to more openly discuss these significant shortfalls and risks. Unfortunately, the President's defense budget request earlier this year fell short of addressing identified military shortfalls as it was riddled with optimistic economic assumptions, budget gimmicks and provided only about one-half of the funding necessary to meet the Joint Chiefs' unfunded requirements.

It is in this context that the conferees went to work, targeting additional funding for a variety of sorely needed quality of life, readiness and equipment initiatives. However, despite the conferees' best efforts, we are not eliminating shortfalls, we are simply struggling to manage them. Absent a long-term, sustained

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commitment to revitalizing America's armed forces, we will continue to run the inevitable risks that came from asking our troops to do more with less.

This conference report also contains the most important and significant Department of Energy reorganization proposal since the agency's creation more than two decades ago.

Earlier this year, the bipartisan "Cox-Dicks Committee" released its report on the national security implications of U.S. technology transfers to the People's Republic of China. The Cox Committee identified lax security at DOE's nuclear laboratories as a critical national security problem and unanimously concluded that China had attained classified information on "every currently deployed thermonuclear warhead in the U.S. ballistic missile arsenal."

Following the Cox Committee report, President Clinton's own Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, chaired by former Senator Rudman, issued its report highly critical of DOE's failure to protect the nation's nuclear secrets. The report of the President's advisory board concluded that DOE is "a dysfunctional bureaucracy that has proven it is incapable of reforming itself." As a consequence, the Rudman panel recommended the creation of a new agency – either independent or semiautonomous within the Department – to manage DOE's nuclear weapons activities.

The conference report would implement the recommendations of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to create a semi-autonomous agency within DOE and vest it with responsibility for nuclear weapons research and production. The reorganization will go a long way towards streamlining DOE's excessive bureaucracy and improving accountability, all in an effort to ensure that our nation's most vital nuclear secrets are better managed and secured.

Mr. Speaker, some questions have been raised in some quarters on the possible impact that the reorganization provisions could have on DOE environmental programs and, in particular, on the status of existing waivers of sovereign immunity agreements between the federal government and individual states. In a few minutes I plan to engage in a colloquy with Mr. Skelton to clarify this point for the legislative record.

At this time, I would also ask unanimous consent to insert in the Record following my statement a letter that Senator Warner and I have jointly written to the National Governor's Association and the National Association of Attorneys General that addresses these questions in more detail. The bottom line is that this conference report does not impact or change current environmental law or regulation and it does not impact or change existing waivers of sovereign immunity agreements.

Mr. Speaker, this conference report is before the House today only as a result of the efforts of all conferees. In particular, I want to recognize the critical roles played by the Armed Services Committee subcommittee and panel chairmen and ranking members. Their efforts, along with those of Mr. Skelton, made my job easier and their dedication to getting the job done is clearly evident in this conference report.

I would also like to pay tribute to Senator Warner, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Senator Warner's years of experience proved instrumental in strengthening the conference report and in bringing this complicated conference to closure on schedule, in only three weeks.

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Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the efforts of the Armed Services Committee staff. This is a large, complex and often controversial bill, and we would not be here today were it not for the staff's professionalism and dedication.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation and I urge all of my colleagues to support the conference report.

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